

# Special Edition

May 2006

## Ainsworth Draft Environmental Assessment Available for Public Review

A Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) for renewal or conversion of the long-term water supply contract for the Ainsworth Irrigation District (AID) in Nebraska has been completed. The DEA was prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and involved cooperation with federal and state agencies and the Ainsworth Irrigation District.

Reclamation has developed the following three alternatives, which are further explained and evaluated in the DEA:

- (1) Continue Full Irrigation with No Change in Operation (**No Action**)
- (2) Continue Irrigation With Increased Base Water Supply (**Irrigation**)
- (3) Continue Irrigation with Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation Improvements (**FWR**)

The “**No Contract Alternative**” under which Reclamation would not renew or convert the existing long-term water service contract with the AID was considered and eliminated from detailed analysis for the following reasons:

- (1) It does not meet the purpose of and need for the proposed action.
- (2) If this alternative were implemented, the AID would not have a project water supply and could not use the existing distribution system. Water stored in Merritt Reservoir would no longer be available to the AID for irrigation use. After five years of non-use the AID's water right could be canceled by the State of Nebraska. Storage space in Merritt could provide for a variety of options other than just irrigation purposes. However, if the storage and use of the water were changed to any purpose other than that provided for in the authorizing legislation, that change would require approval and reauthorization by the U.S. Congress.
- (3) The AID has a right-to-renew clause in their existing water service contract.
- (4) Reclamation is required by the Reclamation Act of 1956 to provide districts holding such a contract a first right to a share of the project's available water supply.
- (5) The AID's financial obligation to the United States would not be repaid.

The DEA is being made available for a 30-day public review and comment period that commences on the date of publication of the DEA and closes on June 10, 2006. A

copy of the DEA is available on Reclamation's web site at [www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao/](http://www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao/). It is also available for public review at the following locations:

### **Offices**

- ★ Bureau of Reclamation, Nebraska-Kansas Area Office, 203 West Second Street, Grand Island, NE (308) 389-5307
- ★ Bureau of Reclamation, McCook Field Office, 1706 W. Third, McCook, NE (308) 345-1027
- ★ Bureau of Reclamation, Great Plains Regional Office, 316 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Billings, MT (406) 247-7638
- ★ Ainsworth Irrigation District, one mile east of Ainsworth and 1/4 mile north, Ainsworth, NE (402) 387-2440

### **Libraries**

- ★ Valentine Public Library, 324 N Main, Valentine, NE (402) 376-3160
- ★ Ainsworth Public Library, 445 N Main St, Ainsworth, NE (402) 387-2032

### **City Offices**

- ★ Valentine City Clerk, 323 N Main Street, Valentine, NE (402) 376-2323
- ★ Ainsworth City Clerk, 606 E 4<sup>th</sup> St, Ainsworth, NE (402) 387-2494

### **Website**

Bureau of Reclamation – [www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao](http://www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao)

A personal copy can be obtained by contacting Judy O'Sullivan, Public Involvement Specialist at Reclamation's Grand Island Office, P.O. Box 1607, Grand Island, NE 68802, [josullivan@gp.usbr.gov](mailto:josullivan@gp.usbr.gov), (308) 389-5307. Comments on the DEA or requests for additional information should be directed to Judy O'Sullivan at the address shown.

## **Ainsworth Contract Renewal Negotiations**

**MAY 31, 2006  
BEGINNING AT 9 A.M.  
CONFERENCE CENTER  
HWY 20 & ASH STREET  
AINSWORTH, NE**

The initial contract negotiation session for the renewal or conversion of the AID's water service contract will be held May 31 at Ainsworth. Representatives from Reclamation and the District will be discussing provisions of the current contract and negotiating

changes or revisions to be included in the renewed or converted contract. The formal negotiation session will be conducted only between representatives from Reclamation

and the AID. During that time the public may attend as observers only and no public comment will be accepted. After the close of the formal negotiation session, representatives of Reclamation and the District welcome your participation and comments.

### **Reclamation and AID Negotiation Teams:**

#### **RECLAMATION**

Alice Johns, Area Manager for Nebraska-Kansas Office  
Steve Ronshaugen, Deputy Area Manager  
Marv Swanda, McCook Field Office Manager  
Jill Manring, Natural Resource Specialist  
John Chaffin, Attorney for the Office of the Field Solicitor  
Tara Kinsey, Repayment Specialist, Great Plains Regional Office

#### **AID**

Brent Johnson, AID Board Member  
Chester Wilkins, AID Board Member  
Donald Fling, AID Board Member  
Rod Imm, AID Manager  
Rodney Palmer, Attorney  
Kent Hiedt, Consultant

Reclamation and the District will be negotiating various aspects of the alternatives listed in the DEA. We anticipate the discussions will yield a “negotiated alternative” that contains elements from more than one of the three alternatives. This negotiated alternative will be evaluated in the final environmental assessment (FEA) document scheduled to be out in August 2006. At that time, Reclamation will identify the preferred alternative.

## **YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS**

It is the Department of the Interior’s policy to afford all interested or affected parties and the general public an opportunity to provide input into the decision-making process regarding water supply contracts. We have previously asked for and documented your input at public meetings and open houses. A draft contract will be made available to the public for a 60-day period to review and comment. As we continue in the contract renewal/conversion process we welcome your input at any time.

If you hang in there with us throughout the process we have an opportunity to provide you with background information and progress reports to help you better understand the NEPA and contract renewal/conversion process. You will be able to ask specific questions, make informed decisions, and provide valuable ideas and suggestions to the process. Your presence at the negotiation sessions and input during the public review of the DEA, FEA, and draft contract are a valuable asset to the process.

All public negotiation sessions will be announced through local and regional newspapers and local radio stations. In addition, the meeting dates will be listed on

Reclamation's web site at [www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao/](http://www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao/).

If you are not currently receiving the *Ainsworth Bulletin* but would like to get on the mailing list please contact Judy O'Sullivan, Public Involvement Specialist for the Bureau of Reclamation, PO Box 1607, Grand Island, NE 68802 or call 308-389-5307.